

NEED FOR NATIONAL HEALTHCARE

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, May 21, I had the honor of chairing a citizens hearing on the need for national health care which took place in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. I heard testimony from citizens from a wide variety of backgrounds including labor, elected officials, seniors, youth, and physicians and health care workers. What I heard powerfully demonstrates the need for fundamental changes in how America takes care of its people. The hearing clearly showed that the time is long overdue to bring our health care system up to the same standards that other industrialized countries have enjoyed for years. I wish to share some of the testimony I received with my colleagues.

Carol McMann, a retiree and an active member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 2020:

"I am disappointed and frustrated about the way our health care system is going in the United States. A lot of people do not want national health care, but when you get in my situation it would be appreciated!"

"When LTV Steel liquidated and took my health insurance in the year 2002, it totally left me out in the cold."

"I had two choices for health care and the expensive one was the one that I had to take because I needed a prescription drug program. I had to purchase individual health care from Highmark Blue Shield/Blue Cross. If I chose an HMO and was accepted, then I had a year that I would not be covered for pre-existing conditions."

"This individual policy costs me \$411.95 a month with a \$1,000 deductible. It increases each year in September. Who knows what the total will be in two more years! My husband and I figured out our total cost for health care each year, including prescription drugs, and it came out to more than \$10,000. It takes all of my social security just to pay the premium alone. I am a homemaker!"

"At the end of the month, we have to watch because if our fixed income is gone, we must use our savings again and again. We fear it may be gone in the future. To wind this down, we no longer vacation, go on shopping sprees, buy our sons much, or enjoy life as before. It has depressed us at times and causes us to feel as though my husband worked for absolutely no reason! He served in the Army and also the Reserves. Our health care just meant everything to us in our retirement. Just everything!"

"We feel this administration and other elected leaders will not fix this problem. Everyone in this country now is just expected to take care of themselves."

Mike Sabat, an unemployed Anchor Hocking worker whose son Mikey suffers from autism:

"Whatever happened to the American dream of hard work at a good job with medical benefits? Now we have to ask employers what kind of medical insurance they offer, how much it costs, and then deal with an endless assortment of HMOs, PPOs, and managed care and third-party administrators. And don't forget the eye care, dental, orthotics, and mental health coverage. It seems like we have been working all our lives just for our medical benefits!"

"I am laid-off again at the present time, however, a union contract saved my medical insurance for four months."

"In a country so rich, no one should have to go without food, water, clothing, shelter, quality education, and especially health care!"

"People should not be in debt, as I am, over their medical insurance or bills!"

"Those commercials about insurance fraud kill me. I think when you have insurance and you go to the doctor or hospital thinking you are covered then you get a large bill, that's the real insurance fraud!"

Ian Thompson, a recent graduate of Penn State University who will soon be losing his health coverage:

"Simply put, to say that the current health care system is failing to meet the needs of America's young adults is at best a gross understatement. While young people between the ages of 19 to 29 account for a mere 15 percent of the U.S. population, they are disproportionately represented among the roughly 45 million Americans who currently lack health insurance, accounting for roughly 30 percent according to recent census figures. These findings have shown that young people account for the highest percentage of uninsured Americans."

"Nineteen to 29 year olds represent one of the biggest and fastest growing segments of the population living day to day without health insurance, yet individuals in this age group rarely appear in the national debate on health insurance."

"It probably comes as no surprise that one of the largest barriers for young adults in seeking health insurance coverage is cost. In many instances, the price of coverage simply rises faster than incomes, making it especially difficult for younger people to obtain coverage."

"For many younger people, the consequences of going without health insurance don't seem as immediate as cutting back on grocery bills, losing car insurance, or missing a rent or mortgage payment. So they decide to take a chance—a calculated risk that they won't face a serious and costly health crisis—and forgo health coverage for months and often years at a time. Sadly, for many this proves to be a devastating gamble. When catastrophes hit the uninsured, as they can and do to individuals in every age group, many are left completely buried in massive amounts of debt, unable to afford even basic medical necessities."

"With the numbers of uninsured Americans steadily increasing, today's young people face the sad prospect of being sicker and less economically productive over the course of their lives. Amid a soft job market and ever increasing insurance costs, many experts fear that more and more young adults will forgo medical care altogether. Research has in fact shown that it is a common practice among uninsured young people to go to a doctor less often and later into an illness, often ending up with so many other countless uninsured Americans in hospital emergency rooms for conditions that easily could have been treated at an earlier time."

Those who argue that younger adults are an age group that does not have the same health needs as other segments of the population simply have not been paying attention to the facts. Younger adults have the highest number of annual visits to emergency rooms each year (usually from injuries). They account for a third of new HIV diagnoses. And nearly four million pregnancies occur in women in their 20s every year. The results of a lack of insurance for young people are truly shocking and should act as a wake-up call to the consciences of Americans from across the political spectrum. The Institute of Medicine estimates that 18,000 young adults die each year because they lack health insurance to cover their problems. Additionally, uninsured adults are 25 percent

more likely to die prematurely than those with private health insurance coverage.

"There is something inherently perverted and fundamentally flawed with a health care system that prides itself as being the best and most advanced in the world while at the same time allowing 18,000 young people to die each and every year from illnesses and diseases that in many cases could be avoided with simple preventive treatment."

"The time is long overdue to change our outrageously costly and grossly inefficient health care system to one that meets the basic needs of the American public in terms of gaining universal, efficient, available, and affordable access to the highest quality health care. H.R. 676, the U.S. National Health Insurance Act goes a long way towards accomplishing this very goal. This legislation would improve and expand upon what older Americans already receive through the very successful Medicare program to include all U.S. residents. To say it is needed is an understatement. The current for-profit system of health care must be replaced with one that puts the interests of people first."

HONORING THE LIFE ACHIEVEMENTS OF JUANA BORDAS

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Juana Bordas, a leader in Denver's Hispanic community and a great Coloradan. At a time when immigration is so hotly debated and in such divisive ways, the story of Juana Bordas is inspiring.

Juana Bordas was born in El Salvador, but emigrated to the United States from Nicaragua when she was just three years old. Her parents and her seven siblings made a difficult journey over many miles in the hull of a banana boat!

From these humble beginnings, Juana has gone on to become one of the most respected women in Colorado, not only as a member of the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, but also the National Hispana Leadership Institute. From this place of stature, she speaks eloquently of the importance of embracing one's history—particularly for Latina women and their mothers. Juana said that it was difficult as a child to be poor and dark-skinned. She acknowledges that there were times as a child that she was embarrassed to know that her mother only achieved a fifth grade education, mothered eight children and worked in the cafeteria of Juana's elementary school. She says that the shame she once felt for her mother's history has now become a great source of pride. The tremendous courage and sacrifice her mother exhibited have been the foundation for her children to lead a better life. Juana calls this "servant leadership." She makes the point that instead of looking at her mother's experience as subservient, it really embodies the qualities of a true leader: hard work, driving purpose, courage and dedication to a cause greater than one's own self-interest. Those qualities should be admired, embraced and emulated as young Latinas strive to achieve their goals. From my vantage point, the example of Juana's mother—and Juana's own life—are truly inspiring.